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FABLES™
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suggested for
mature readers
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AS THE NIGHT WINDS ON...

THE DEAL IS ***SIMPLE,*** BRANDISH. I CAN CLIMB BACK OUT OF THIS PIT AND DUMP A LOT OF ***CONCRETE*** ON YOU. THAT'S WHAT YOU HEAR CHURNING UP ABOVE IN THE MIXER.

AND YOU CAN ENJOY YOUR IMMORTALITY ***BURIED*** FOR A THOUSAND YEARS OR MORE.

THAT'S OPTION NUMBER ONE.

I HAVE TO CONFESS, MISS RED, I'M NOT A ***FAN*** OF OPTION ONE.

Straight Through The Heart

Part Three of Camelot

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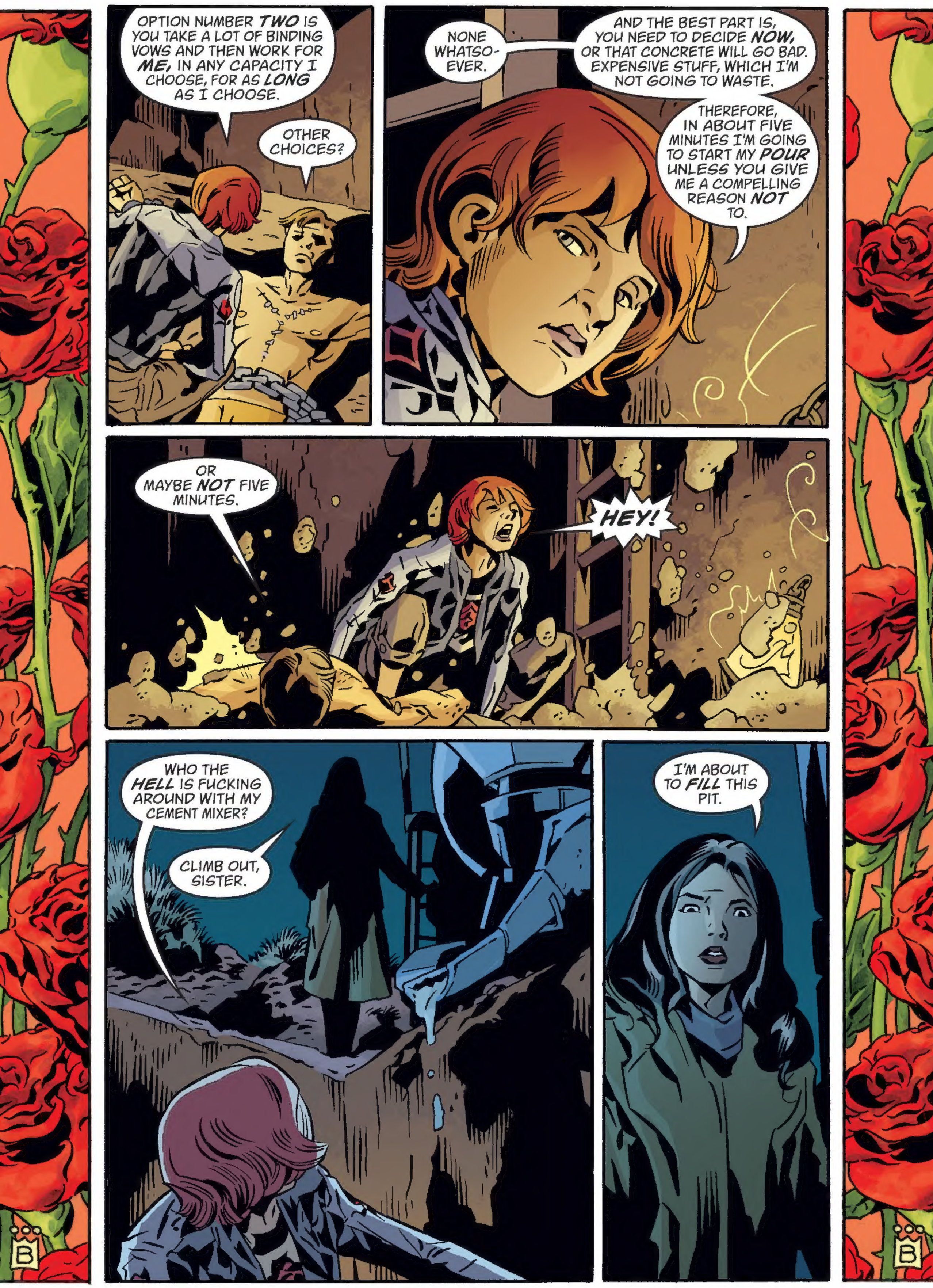
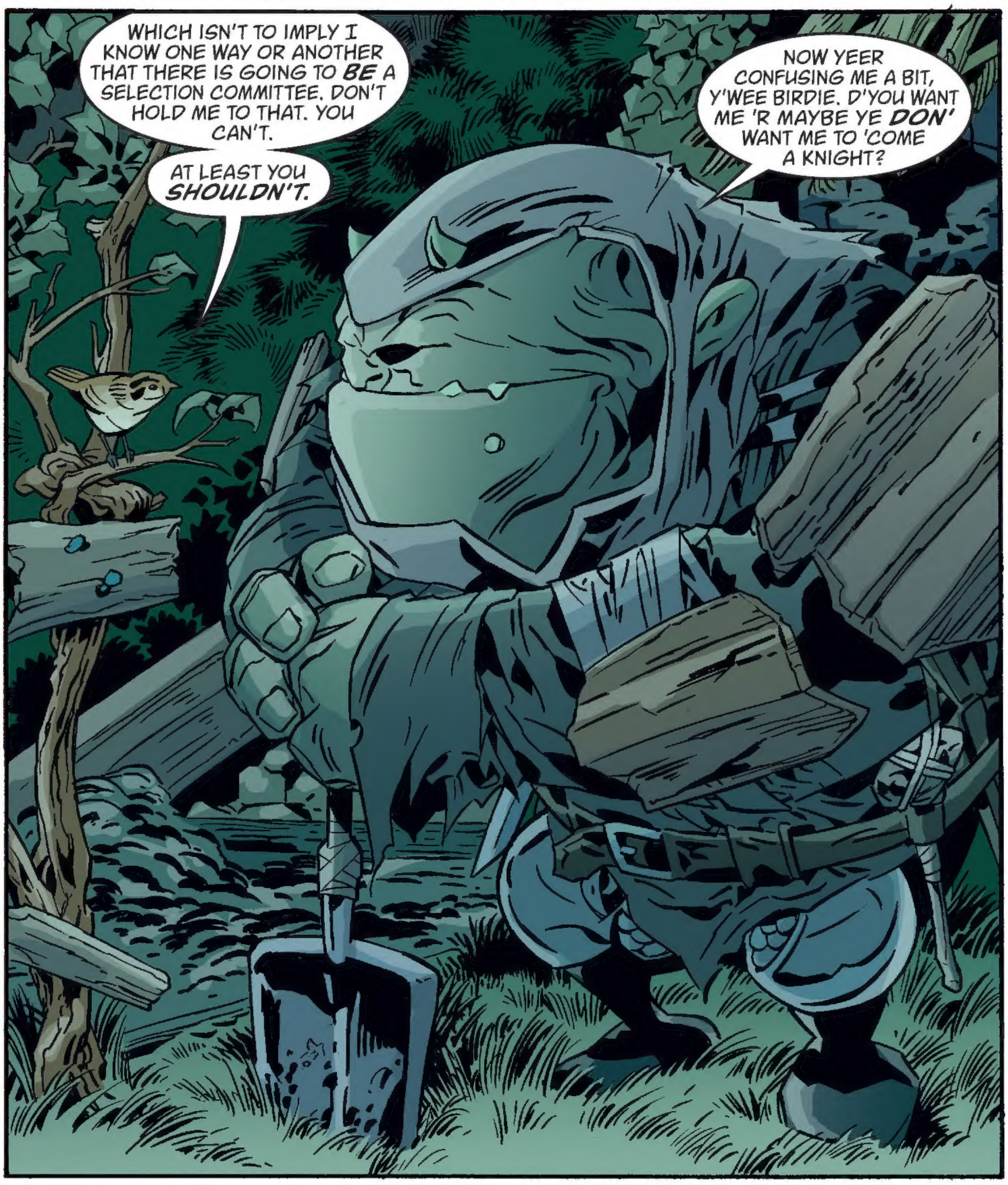
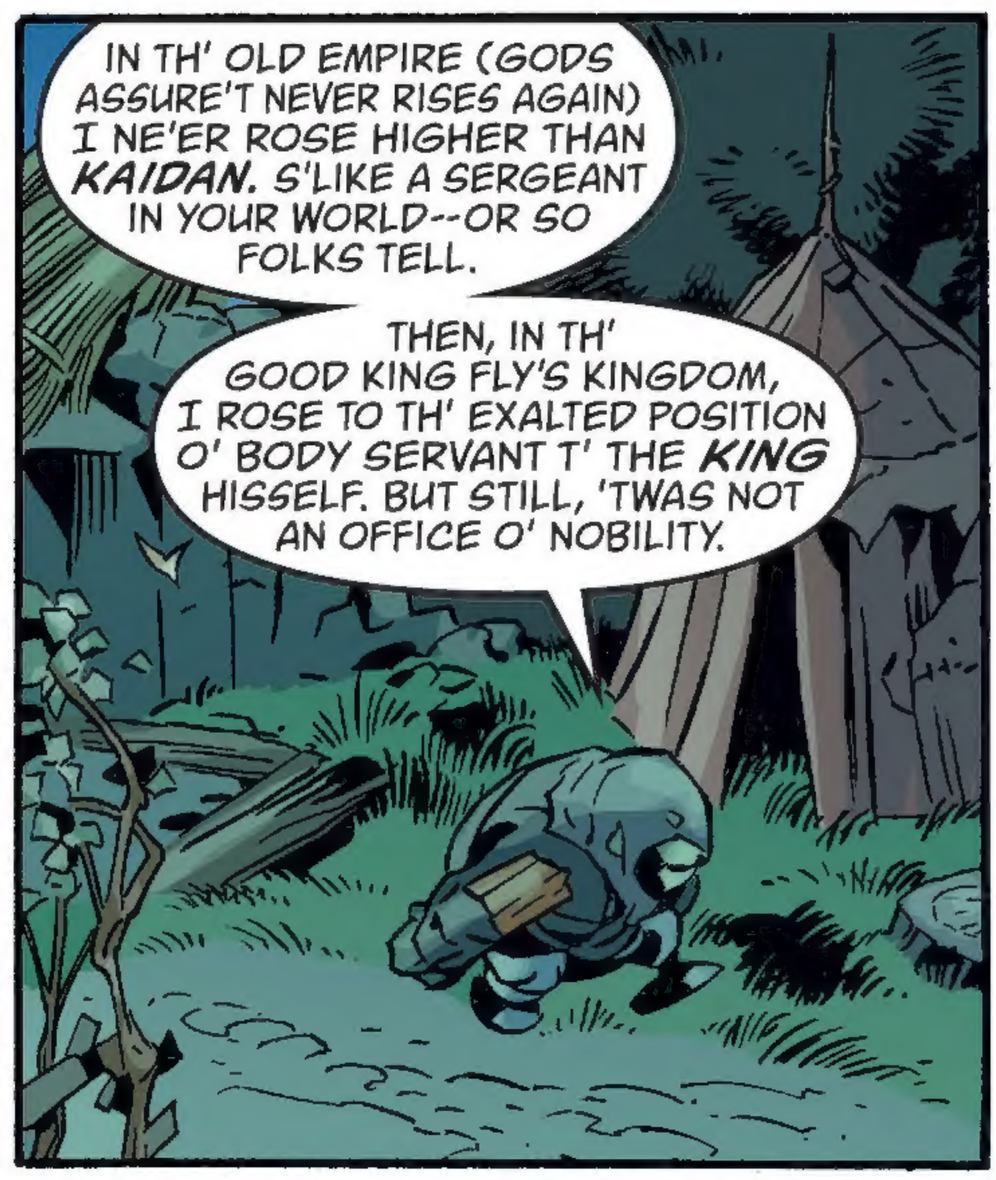

OPTION NUMBER TWO IS YOU TAKE A LOT OF BINDING VOWS AND THEN WORK FOR ME, IN ANY CAPACITY I CHOOSE, FOR AS LONG AS I CHOOSE.
OTHER CHOICES?
NONE WHATSO-EVER.
AND THE BEST PART IS, YOU NEED TO DECIDE NOW, OR THAT CONCRETE WILL GO BAD. EXPENSIVE STUFF, WHICH I'M NOT GOING TO WASTE.
THEREFORE, IN ABOUT FIVE MINUTES I'M GOING TO START MY POUR UNLESS YOU GIVE ME A COMPELLING REASON NOT TO.
OR MAYBE NOT FIVE MINUTES.
HEY!
WHO THE HELL IS FUCKING AROUND WITH MY CEMENT MIXER?
CLIMB OUT, SISTER.
I'M ABOUT TO FILL THIS PIT.

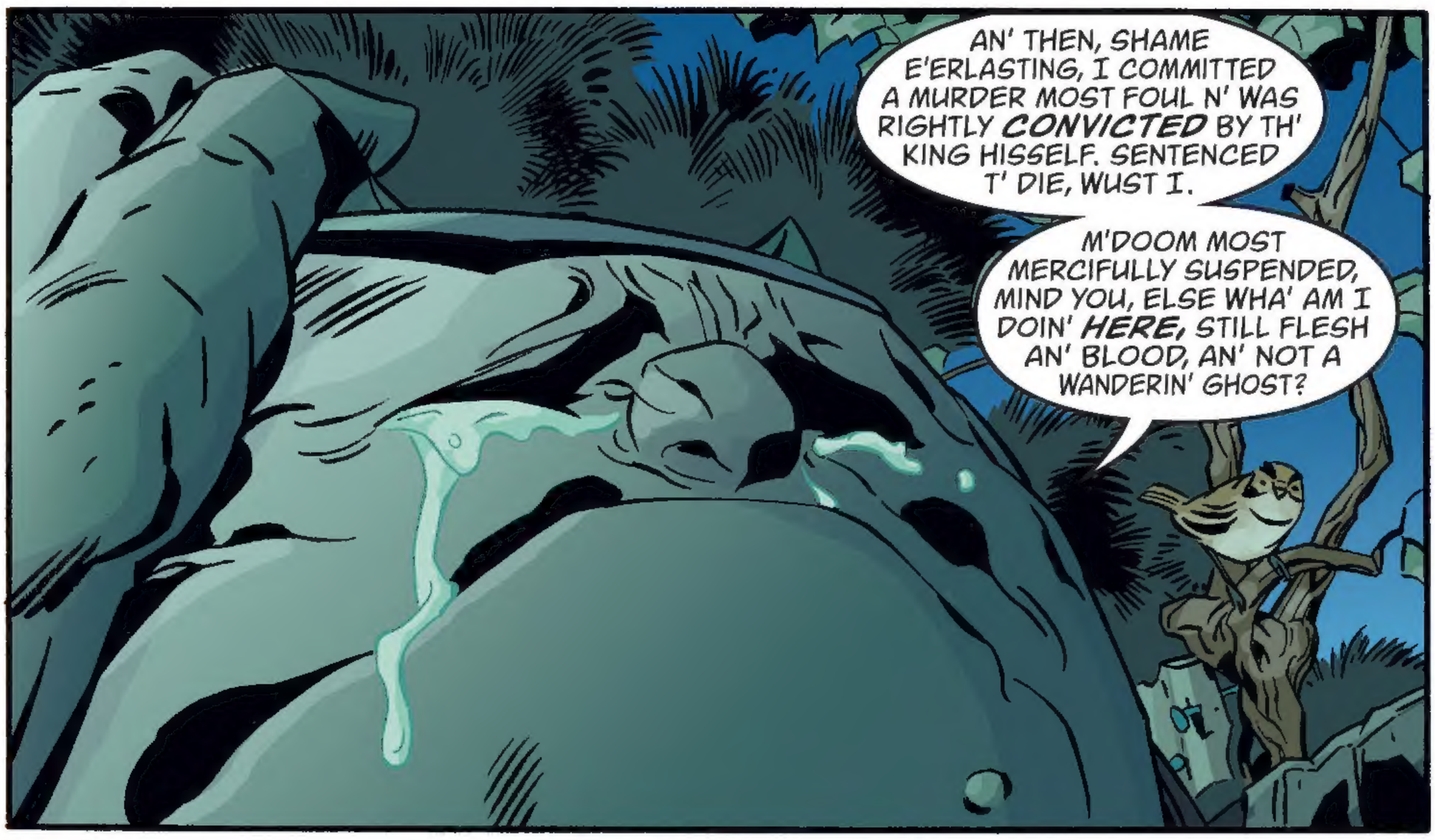
MANY WORLDS AWAY...
A NEW ORDER O' KNIGHTHOOD, Y'SAY? AND YE BE WANTIN' ME?

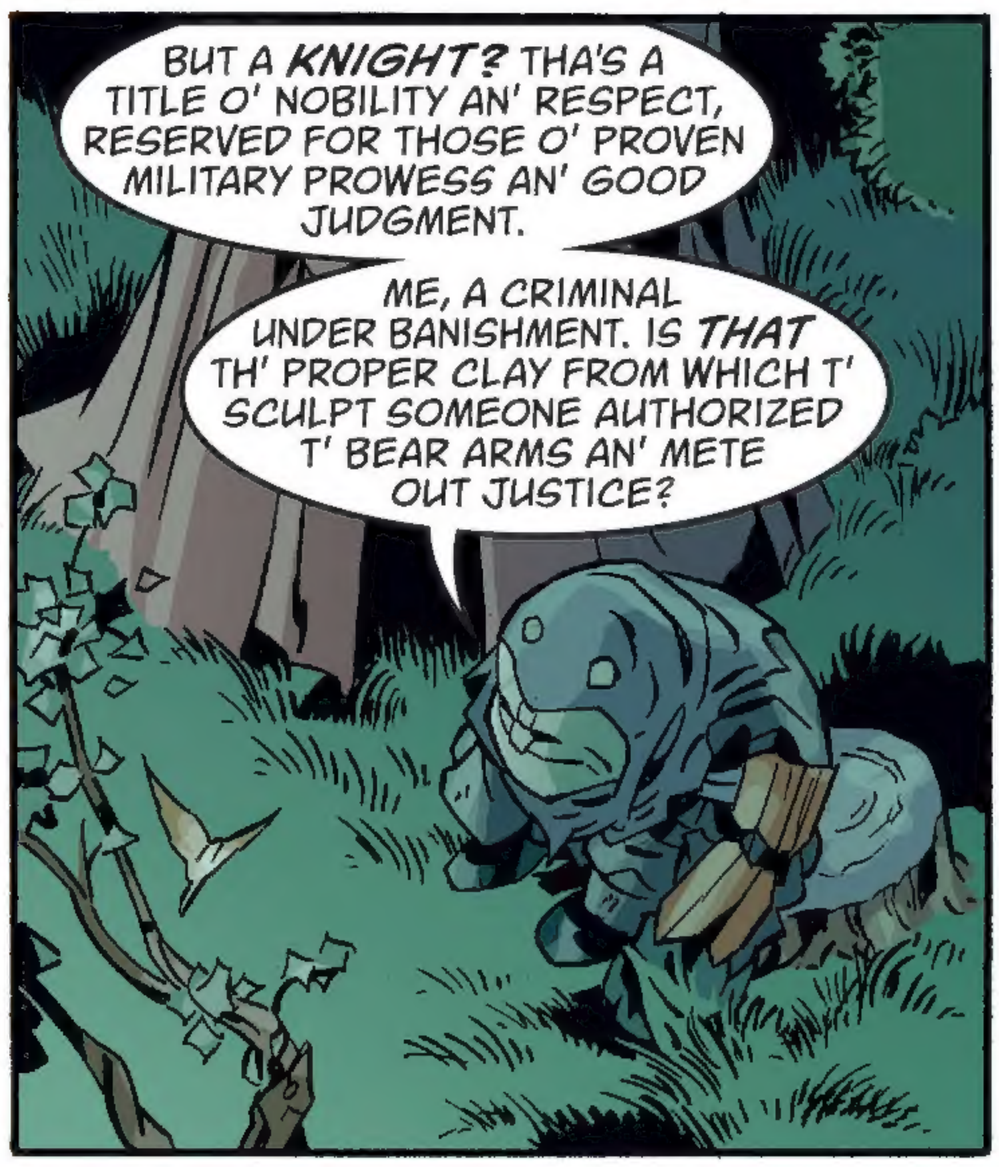
MAYBE WE WANT YOU, MISTER BRUMP. WELL, NOT ME, PER SE. I'M JUST A MESSENGER, NOT A MEMBER OF THE SELECTION COMMITTEE.
WELL, TO TELL YE TH' TRUTH...


WHICH ISN'T TO IMPLY I KNOW ONE WAY OR ANOTHER THAT THERE IS GOING TO BE A SELECTION COMMITTEE. DON'T HOLD ME TO THAT. YOU CAN'T.
AT LEAST YOU SHOULDN'T.
NOW YEER CONFUSING ME A BIT, Y'WEE BIRDIE. D'YOU WANT ME 'R MAYBE YE DON' WANT ME TO 'COME A KNIGHT?

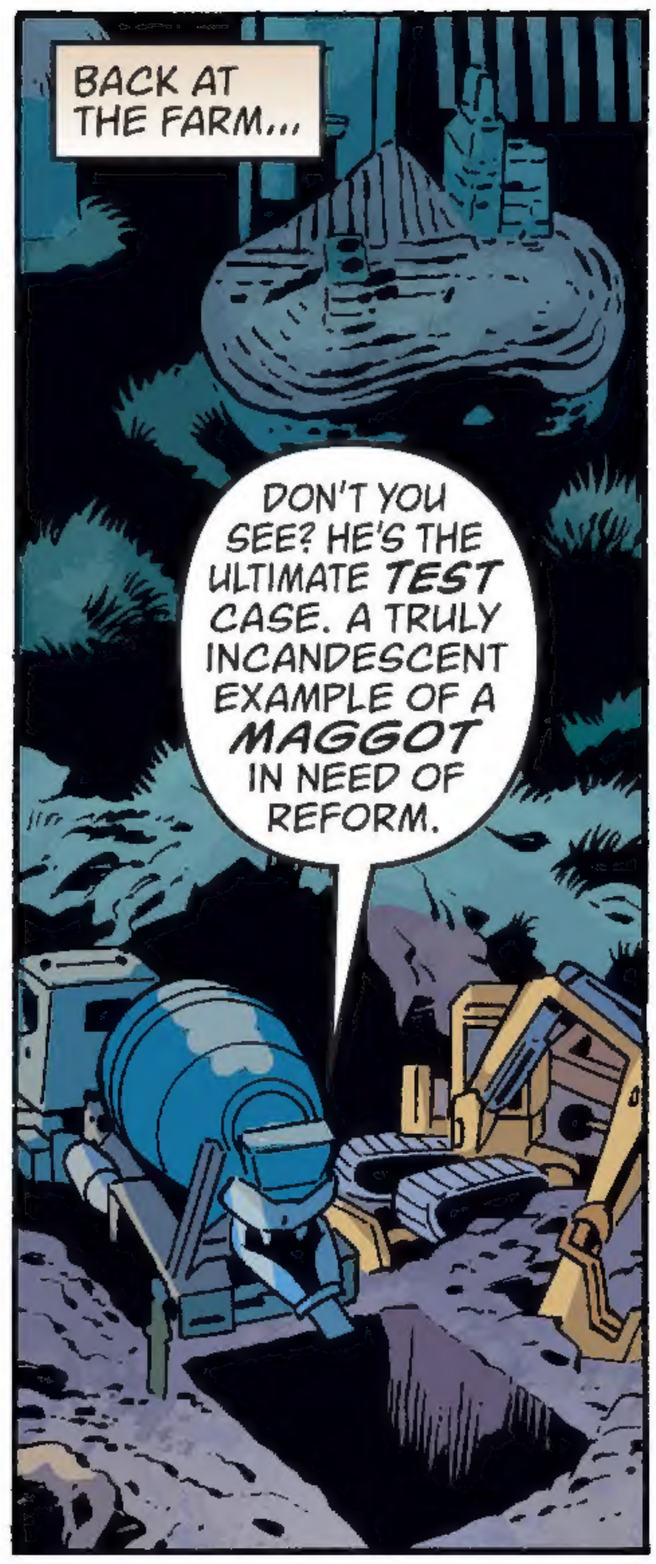
I HA' T' CONFESS, I DON' KNOW'F TIS A GOOD THING. NOT THE NEW ORDER OF KNIGHT-HOOD, MIND YE. I'M NOT EQUIPPED T' JUDGE IT GOOD OR NOT.
BUT I MEAN, I DON' KNOW IF TIS A PROPER THING THA' I BECOME A KNIGHT. FOLLOW ME, Y' FEATHERED LADDIE?

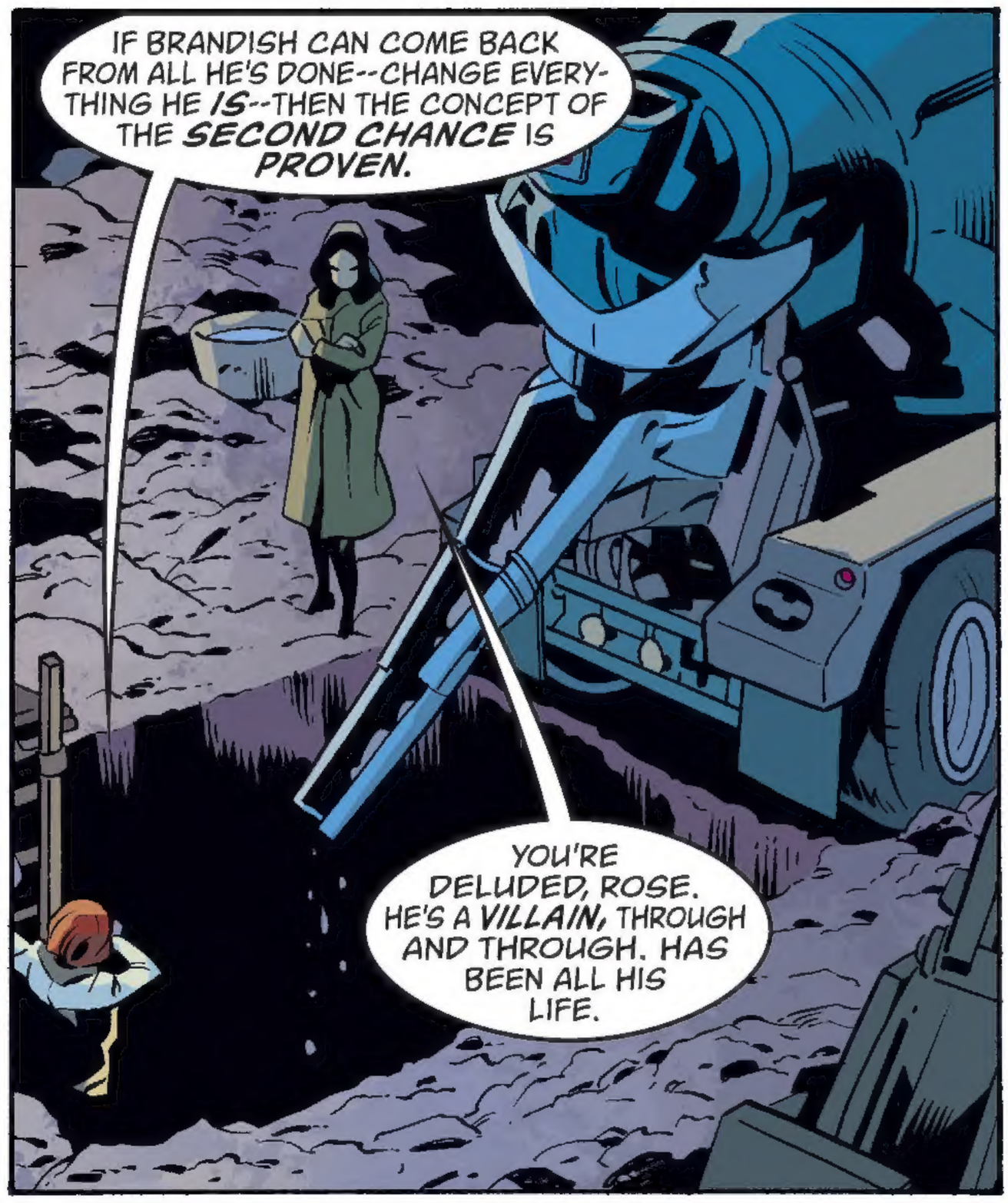

IN TH' OLD EMPIRE (GODS ASSURE'T NEVER RISES AGAIN) I NE'ER ROSE HIGHER THAN KAIDAN. S'LIKE A SERGEANT IN YOUR WORLD--OR SO FOLKS TELL.
THEN, IN TH' GOOD KING FLY'S KINGDOM, I ROSE TO TH' EXALTED POSITION O' BODY SERVANT T' THE KING HISSELF. BUT STILL, 'TWAS NOT AN OFFICE O' NOBILITY.


AN' THEN, SHAME E'ERLASTING, I COMMITTED A MURDER MOST FOUL N' WAS RIGHTLY CONVICTED BY TH' KING HISSELF. SENTENCED T' DIE, WUST I.
M'DOOM MOST MERCIFULLY SUSPENDED, MIND YOU, ELSE WHA' AM I DOIN' HERE, STILL FLESH AN' BLOOD, AN' NOT A WANDERIN' GHOST?


BUT A KNIGHT? THA'S A TITLE O' NOBILITY AN' RESPECT, RESERVED FOR THOSE O' PROVEN MILITARY PROWESS AN' GOOD JUDGMENT.
ME, A CRIMINAL UNDER BANISHMENT. IS THAT TH' PROPER CLAY FROM WHICH T' SCULPT SOMEONE AUTHORIZED T' BEAR ARMS AN' METE OUT JUSTICE?

I THINK THAT'S THE POINT. ROSE RED'S NEW ORDER IS ALL ABOUT CHAMPIONING SECOND CHANCES. I THINK THAT'S WHY THE QUESTING SPELL LED ME TO YOU.
IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE IN NEED OF A SECOND CHANCE.

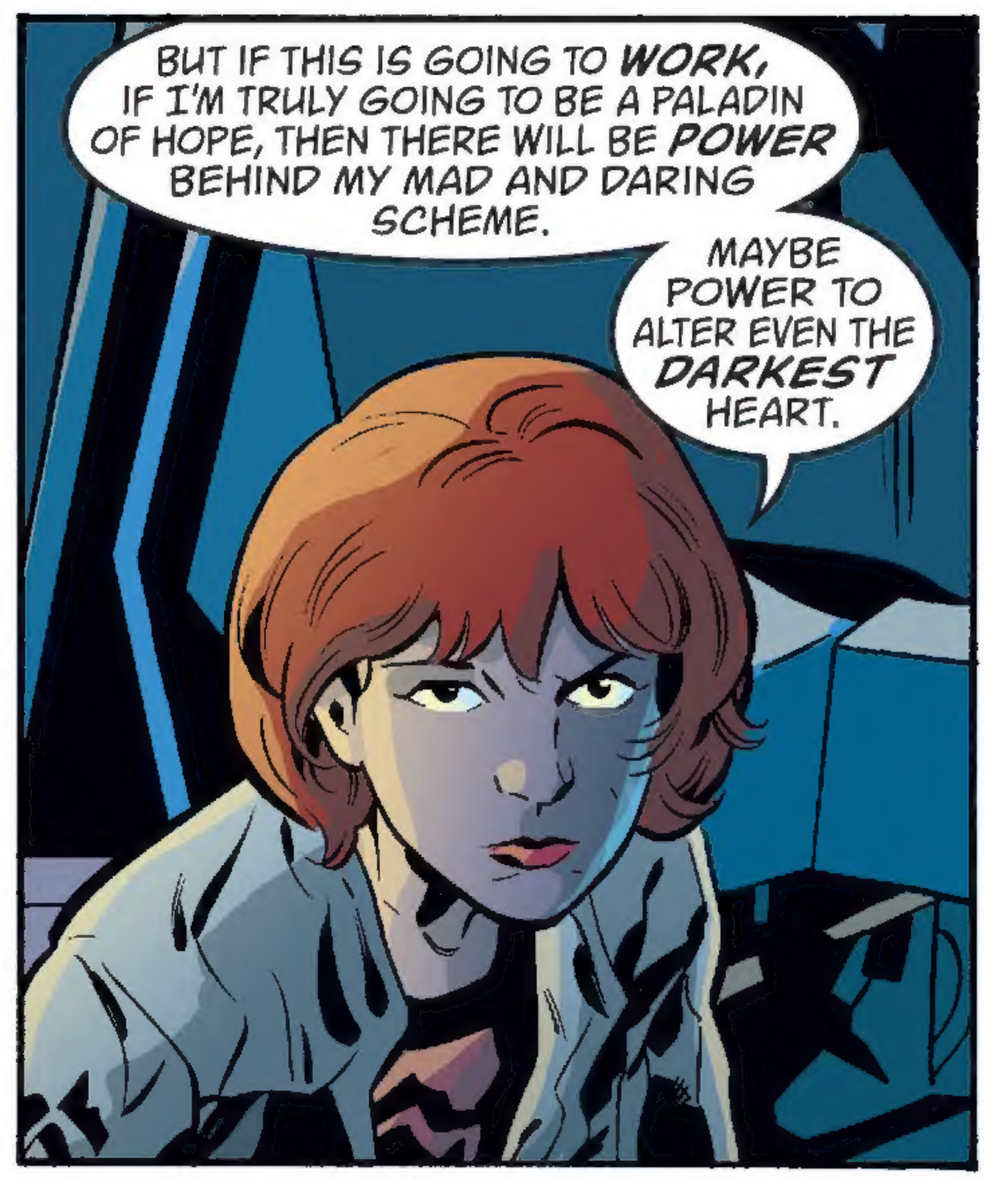

BACK AT THE FARM...
DON'T YOU SEE? HE'S THE ULTIMATE TEST CASE. A TRULY INCANDESCENT EXAMPLE OF A MAGGOT IN NEED OF REFORM.


IF BRANDISH CAN COME BACK FROM ALL HE'S DONE--CHANGE EVERYTHING HE IS--THEN THE CONCEPT OF THE SECOND CHANCE IS PROVEN.
YOU'RE DELUDED, ROSE. HE'S A VILLAIN, THROUGH AND THROUGH. HAS BEEN ALL HIS LIFE.

A LEOPARD CAN'T CHANGE HIS SPOTS. HIS REPTILE NATURE IS DUG IN DEEP. NO ONE CAN ALTER HIS BASIC CHARACTER.
BIGBY DID.
HE DID IT FOR YOU.

PERHAPS THAT PARTICULAR ARGUMENT SHOULD HAVE BEEN SAVED FOR A TIME WHEN THE WOUNDS OF LOSING BIGBY WEREN'T SO FRESH.

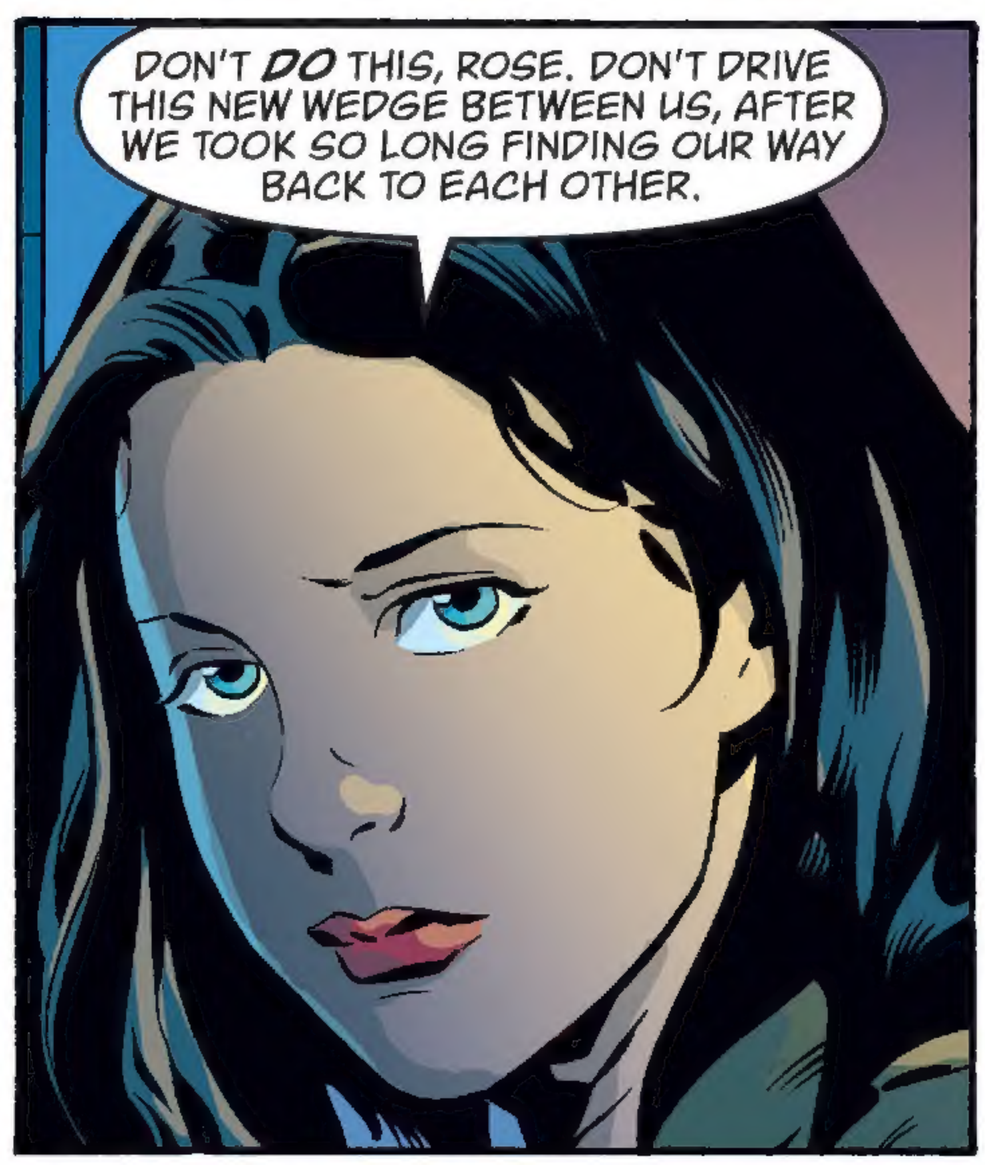
AND THE MAN WHO TOOK HIM FROM ME IS THE SAME ONE LYING DOWN THERE, WAITING ON A WIFE'S RIGHTFUL VENGEANCE.
OKAY, YOU'RE RIGHT, SNOW. MY TIMING SUCKS. ALWAYS HAS.

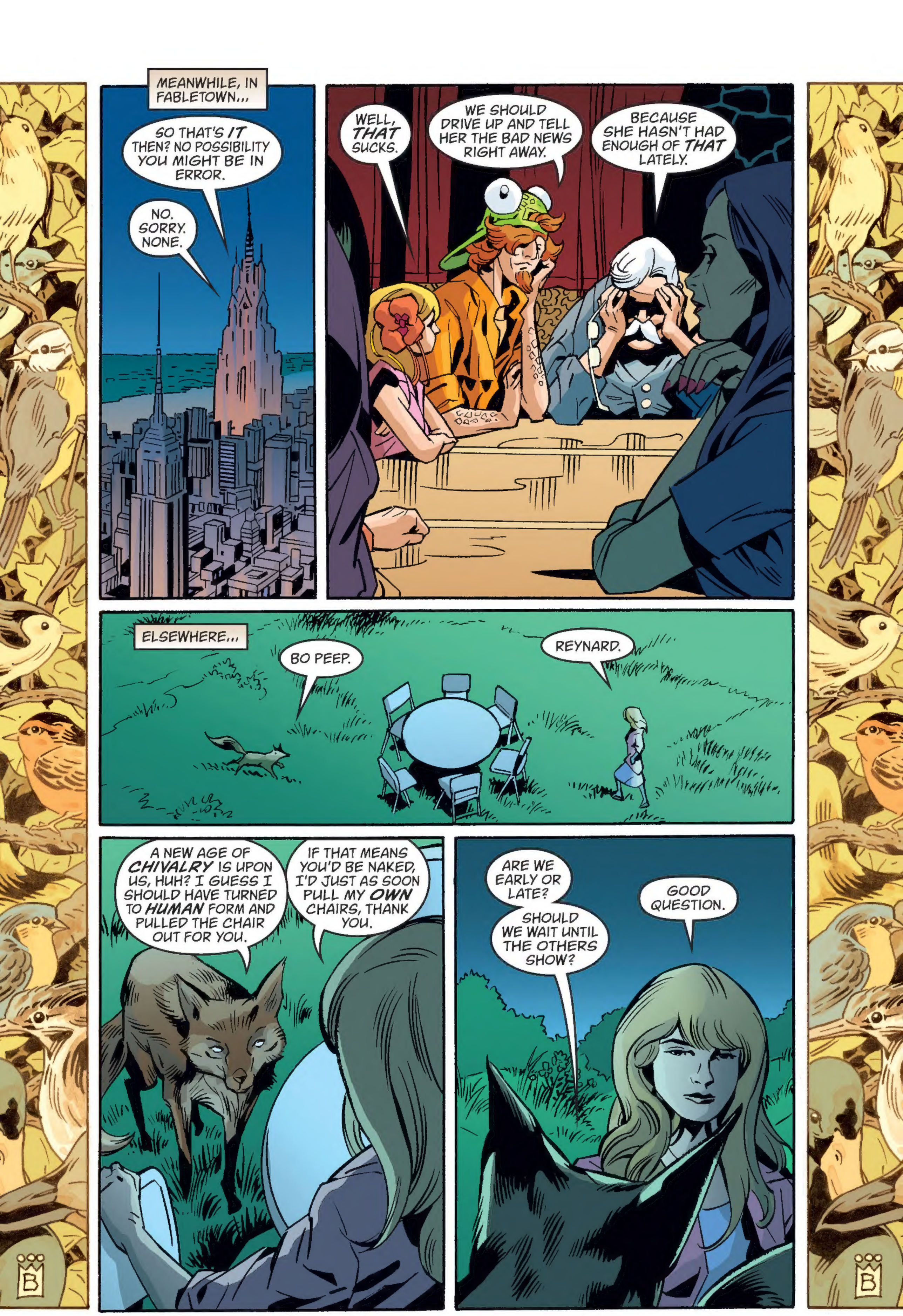

BUT IF THIS IS GOING TO WORK, IF I'M TRULY GOING TO BE A PALADIN OF HOPE, THEN THERE WILL BE POWER BEHIND MY MAD AND DARING SCHEME.
MAYBE POWER TO ALTER EVEN THE DARKEST HEART.

HAVEN'T YOU HEARD? BRANDISH DOESN'T HAVE A HEART. AT LEAST NOT ONE WITHIN OUR REACH.
AND HOPE IS A LIAR. IT'S NOTHING MORE THAN DISAPPOINTMENT DEFERRED.

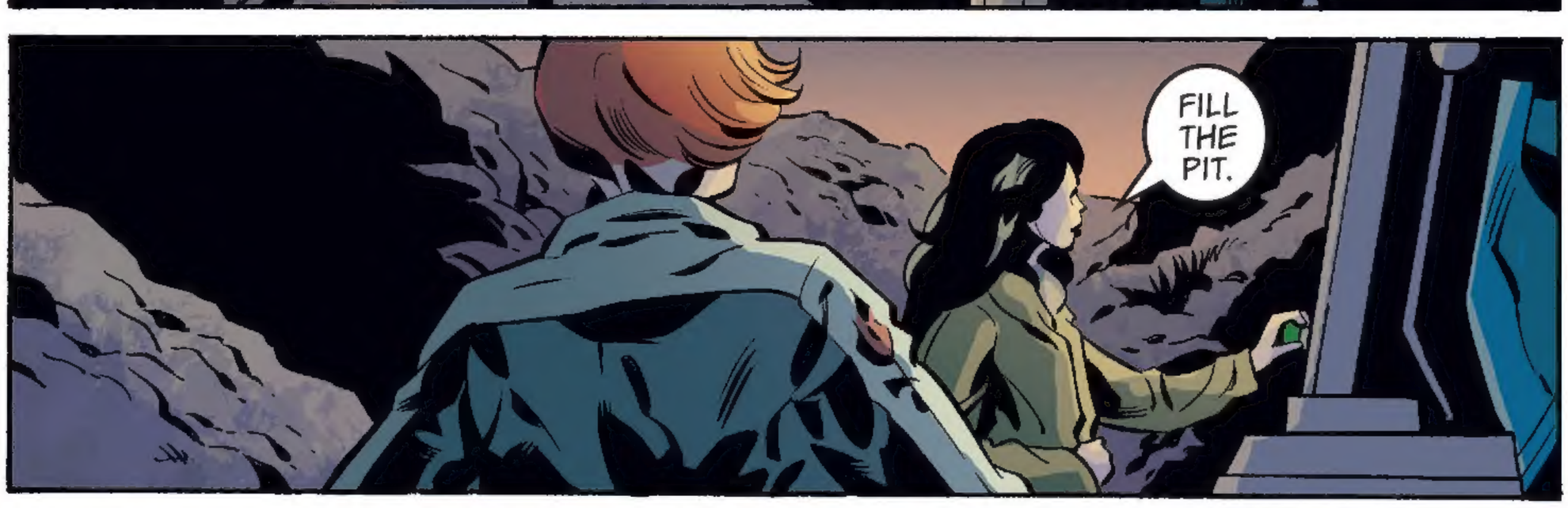
TRUST ME. THIS WILL TURN TO SHIT IN THE END.
JUST LIKE ALL OF MY UNDERTAKINGS DO?
I DIDN'T SAY THAT, BUT IF THE SHOE FITS...

REMEMBER ALL THOSE TIMES YOU WISHED THERE WAS SOMEONE TO WARN YOU JUST BEFORE YOU WERE ABOUT TO DO SOMETHING MONUMENTALLY STUPID?
WELL, THIS IS ONE OF THOSE MOMENTS, AND I'M THE ONE APPEARING JUST IN TIME TO WARN YOU.


DON'T DO THIS, ROSE. DON'T DRIVE THIS NEW WEDGE BETWEEN US, AFTER WE TOOK SO LONG FINDING OUR WAY BACK TO EACH OTHER.


MEANWHILE, IN FABLETOWN...
SO THAT'S IT THEN? NO POSSIBILITY YOU MIGHT BE IN ERROR.
NO. SORRY. NONE.
WELL, THAT SUCKS.
WE SHOULD DRIVE UP AND TELL HER THE BAD NEWS RIGHT AWAY.
BECAUSE SHE HASN'T HAD ENOUGH OF THAT LATELY.
ELSEWHERE...
BO PEEP.
REYNARD.
A NEW AGE OF CHIVALRY IS UPON US, HUH? I GUESS I SHOULD HAVE TURNED TO HUMAN FORM AND PULLED THE CHAIR OUT FOR YOU.
IF THAT MEANS YOU'D BE NAKED, I'D JUST AS SOON PULL MY OWN CHAIRS, THANK YOU.
ARE WE EARLY OR LATE?
SHOULD WE WAIT UNTIL THE OTHERS SHOW?
GOOD QUESTION.

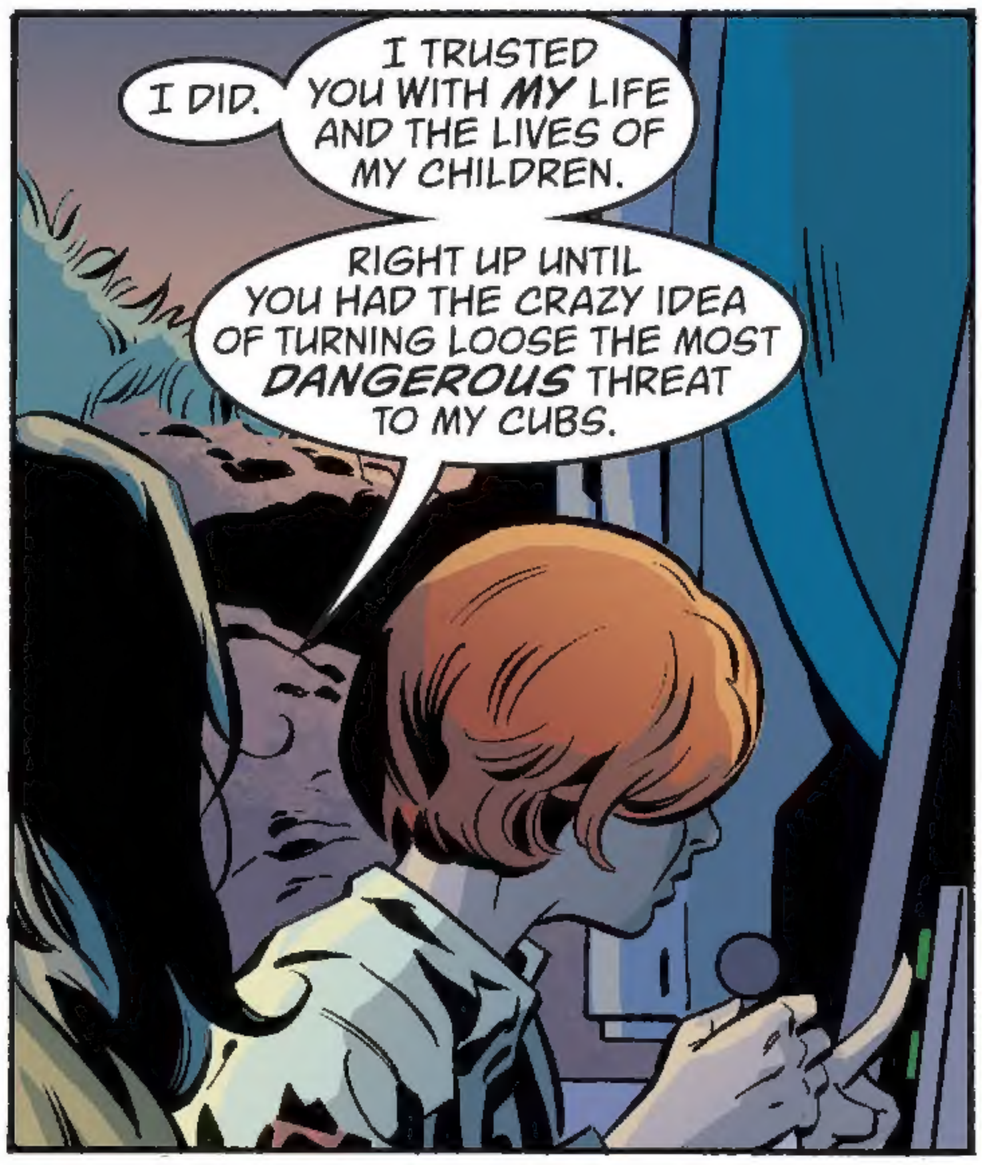
OKAY, FINE!
IF YOU DON'T TRUST ME, IF YOU REALLY ARE THAT ADAMANT, GO AHEAD AND DUMP THE CEMENT ON HIM.


FILL THE PIT.

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?
JUST WHAT YOU SAID.
HEY!

I'M FILLING IN THE PIT.
ONLY IF YOU DIDN'T TRUST ME!
STOP IT! I SURRENDER! I ACCEPT YOUR TERMS!

YES. ONLY THEN.
SO YOU DON'T TRUST ME?
REALLY?


I DID.
I TRUSTED YOU WITH MY LIFE AND THE LIVES OF MY CHILDREN.
RIGHT UP UNTIL YOU HAD THE CRAZY IDEA OF TURNING LOOSE THE MOST DANGEROUS THREAT TO MY CUBS.

DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?
THIS IS IT. MY ABSOLUTE, UNTIL-THE-END-OF-MY-DAYS PURPOSE IN LIFE.

WEIRDLY ENOUGH, THIS ISN'T ME BEING TYPICALLY IRRESPONSIBLE. THIS IS ME BEING TRULY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FOREVER.
WHAT I UNDERSTAND IS THIS.

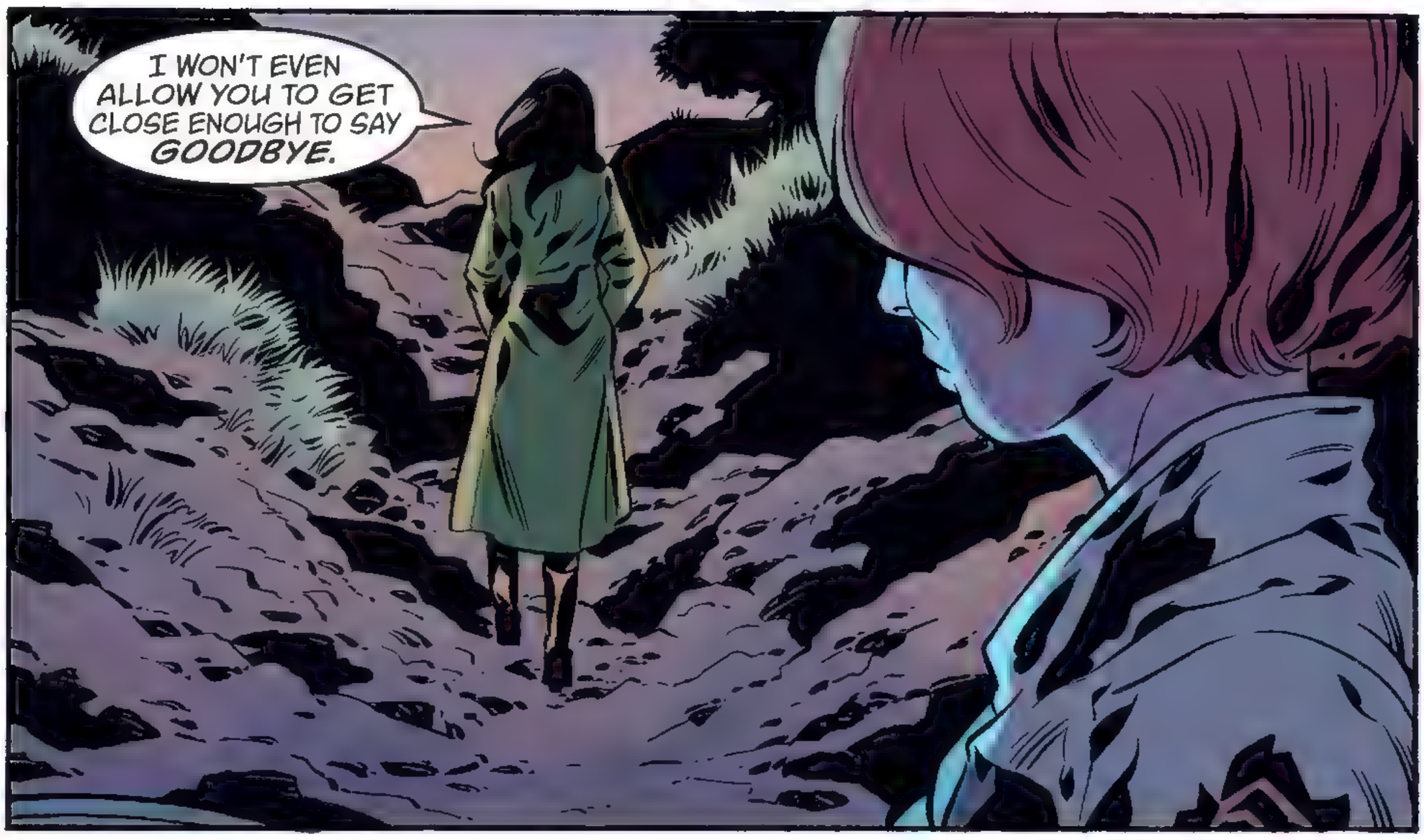
SET HIM FREE AND YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE, FOR EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS AFTERWARDS.

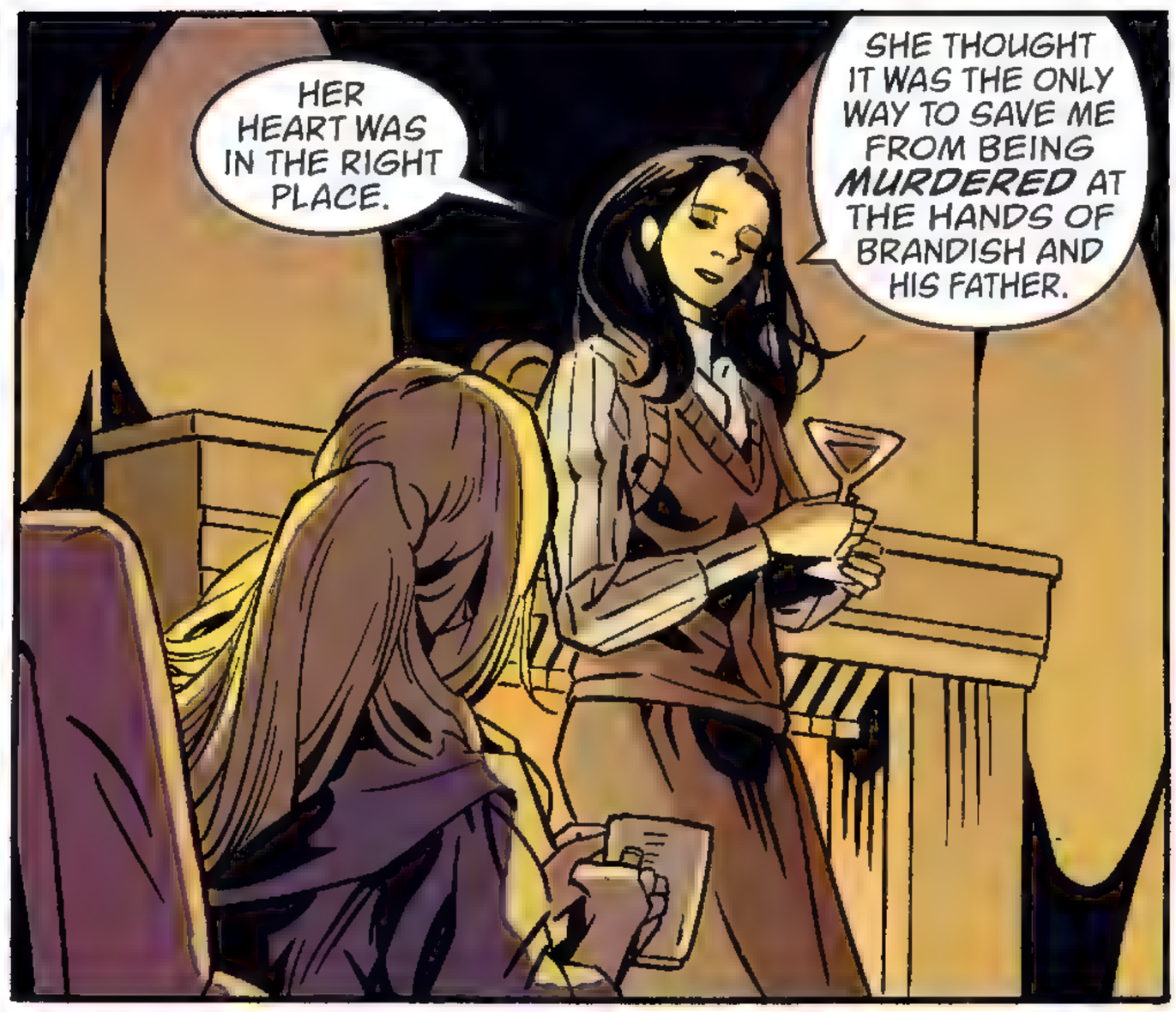
ONCE HE'S RELEASED, I EXPECT HIM TO CARRY OUT HIS EVIL SHIT, BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT MONSTERS DO.
SO THE BLAME THEN LANDS SQUARELY ON YOU.

GO THROUGH WITH THIS AND WE'RE THROUGH.
YOU HAVE HIM. I HAVE MY CHILDREN. AND THE TWO WILL NEVER BE ALLOWED TO COEXIST.

UNDERSTAND?
ACCEPT HIM INTO YOUR LIFE, FOR WHATEVER REASON, YOU LOSE ME AND THE CUBS.

INSTANTLY.

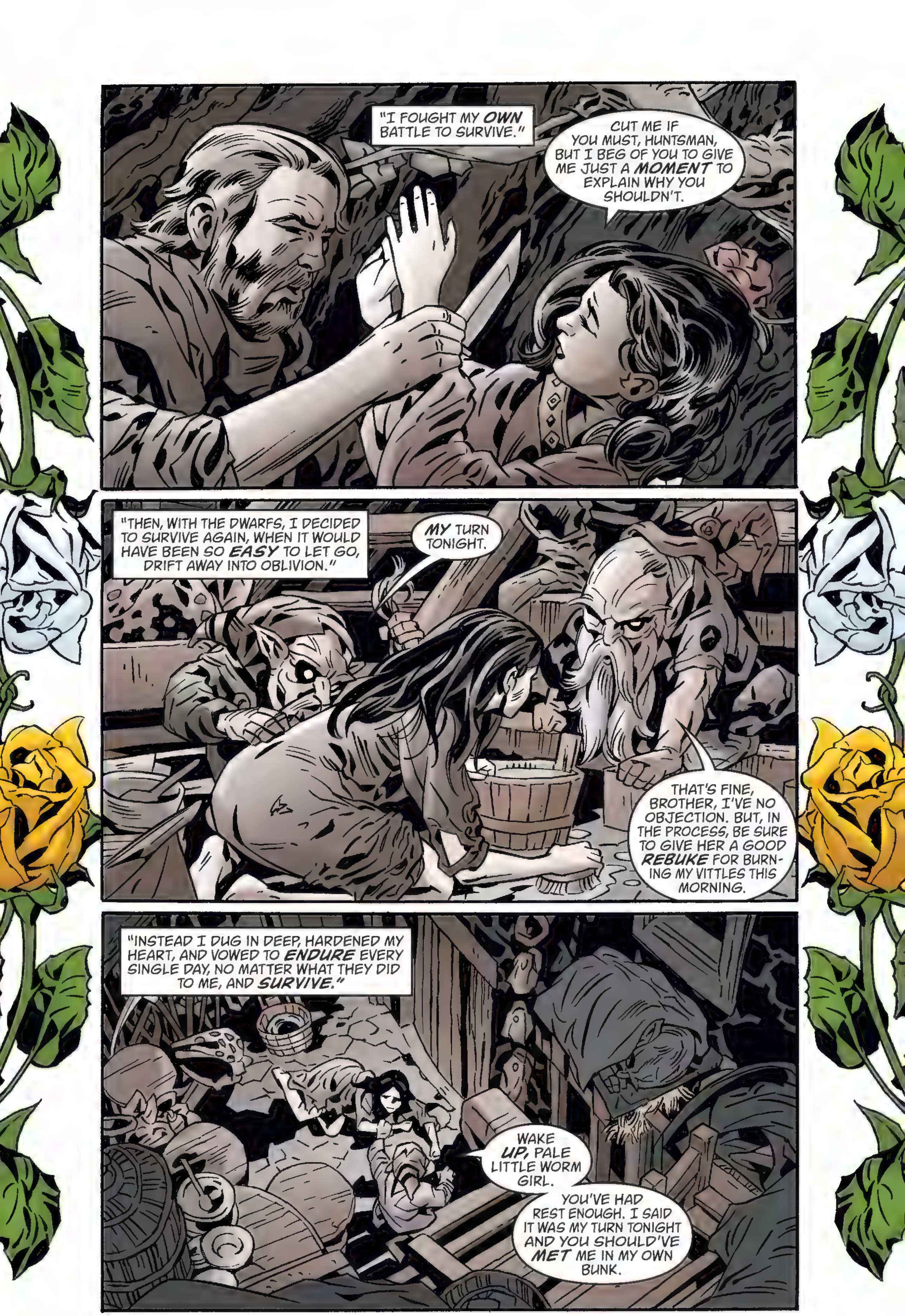

I WON'T EVEN ALLOW YOU TO GET CLOSE ENOUGH TO SAY GOODBYE.

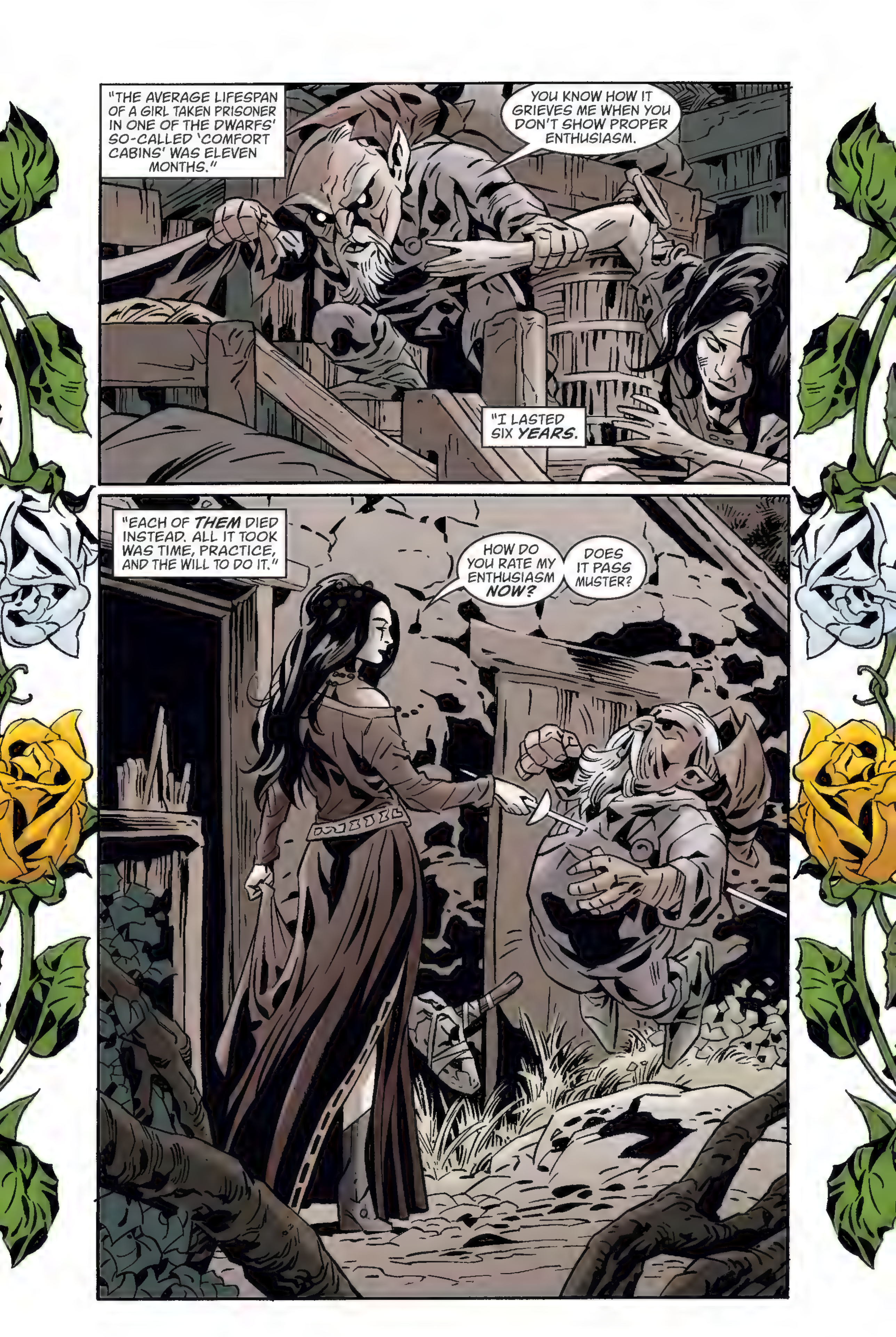


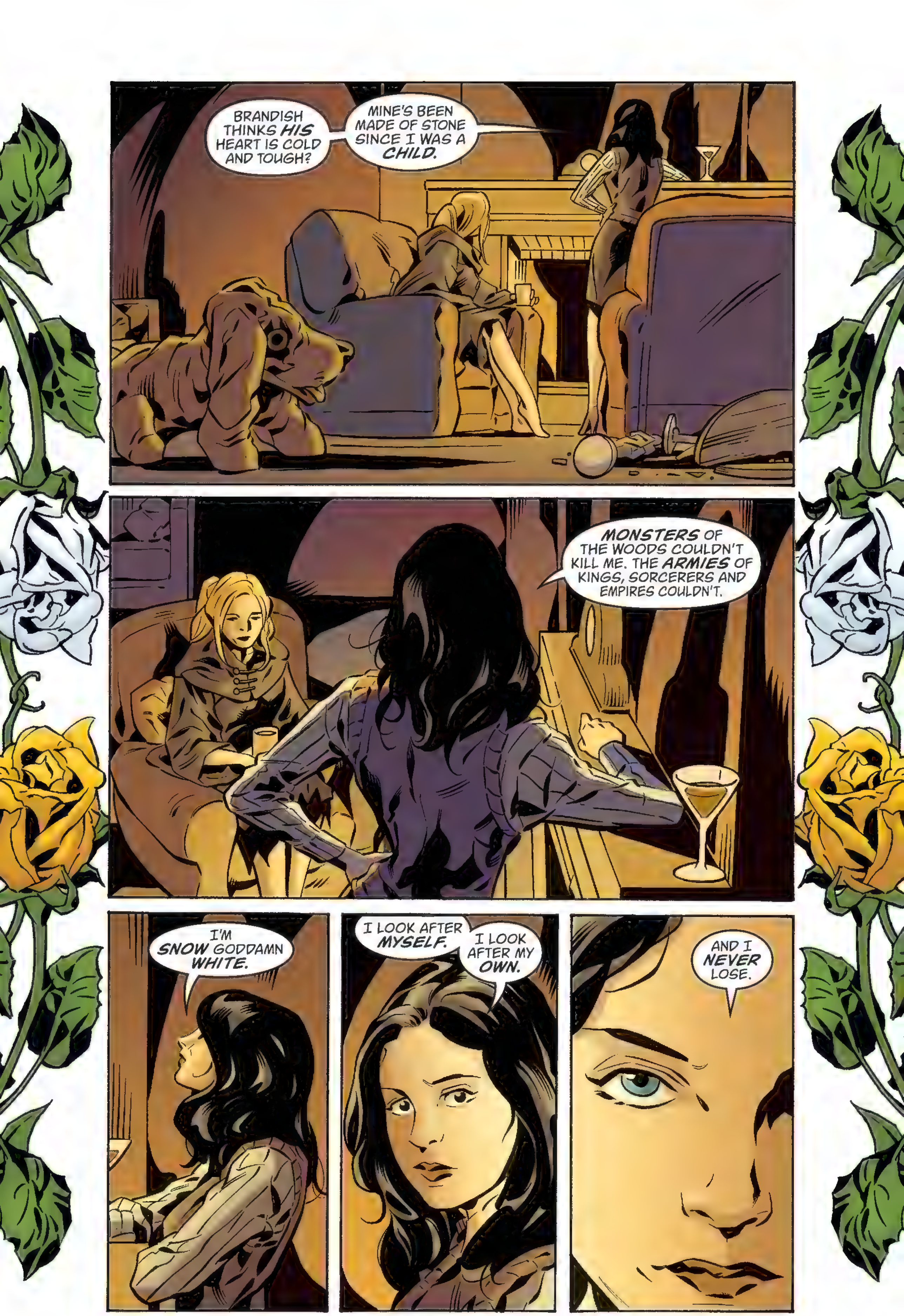
"FROM THAT POINT, I WAS ON MY OWN. WHEN MY STEPMOTHER TRIED TO HAVE ME KILLED, I HAD NO ONE ELSE TO SAVE ME."

TAKE HER OUT INTO THE WOODS TO DO THE DEED.

RETURN HERE WITH HER HEART IN A BOX.


"I FOUGHT MY OWN BATTLE TO SURVIVE."
CUT ME IF YOU MUST, HUNTSMAN, BUT I BEG OF YOU TO GIVE ME JUST A MOMENT TO EXPLAIN WHY YOU SHOULDN'T.
"THEN, WITH THE DWARFS, I DECIDED TO SURVIVE AGAIN, WHEN IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SO EASY TO LET GO, DRIFT AWAY INTO OBLIVION."
MY TURN TONIGHT.
THAT'S FINE, BROTHER, I'VE NO OBJECTION. BUT, IN THE PROCESS, BE SURE TO GIVE HER A GOOD REBUKE FOR BURNING MY VITTLES THIS MORNING.
"INSTEAD I DUG IN DEEP, HARDENED MY HEART, AND VOWED TO ENDURE EVERY SINGLE DAY, NO MATTER WHAT THEY DID TO ME, AND SURVIVE."
WAKE UP, PALE LITTLE WORM GIRL.
YOU'VE HAD REST ENOUGH. I SAID IT WAS MY TURN TONIGHT AND YOU SHOULD'VE MET ME IN MY OWN BUNK.


"THE AVERAGE LIFESPAN OF A GIRL TAKEN PRISONER IN ONE OF THE DWARFS' SO-CALLED 'COMFORT CABINS' WAS ELEVEN MONTHS."
YOU KNOW HOW IT GRIEVES ME WHEN YOU DON'T SHOW PROPER ENTHUSIASM.
"I LASTED SIX YEARS.
"EACH OF THEM DIED INSTEAD. ALL IT TOOK WAS TIME, PRACTICE, AND THE WILL TO DO IT."
HOW DO YOU RATE MY ENTHUSIASM NOW?
DOES IT PASS MUSTER?


BRANDISH THINKS HIS HEART IS COLD AND TOUGH?
MINE'S BEEN MADE OF STONE SINCE I WAS A CHILD.
MONSTERS OF THE WOODS COULDN'T KILL ME. THE ARMIES OF KINGS, SORCERERS AND EMPIRES COULDN'T.
I'M SNOW GODDAMN WHITE.
I LOOK AFTER MYSELF.
I LOOK AFTER MY OWN.
AND I NEVER LOSE.

THERE.
WHAT DID I TELL YOU?
MOST OF THE CEMENT WASHED RIGHT OFF.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY, ROSE RED.
I CAN HARDLY CREDIT WHAT YOU'VE DONE FOR ME, AFTER HOW I TREATED YOUR SISTER AND YOU.

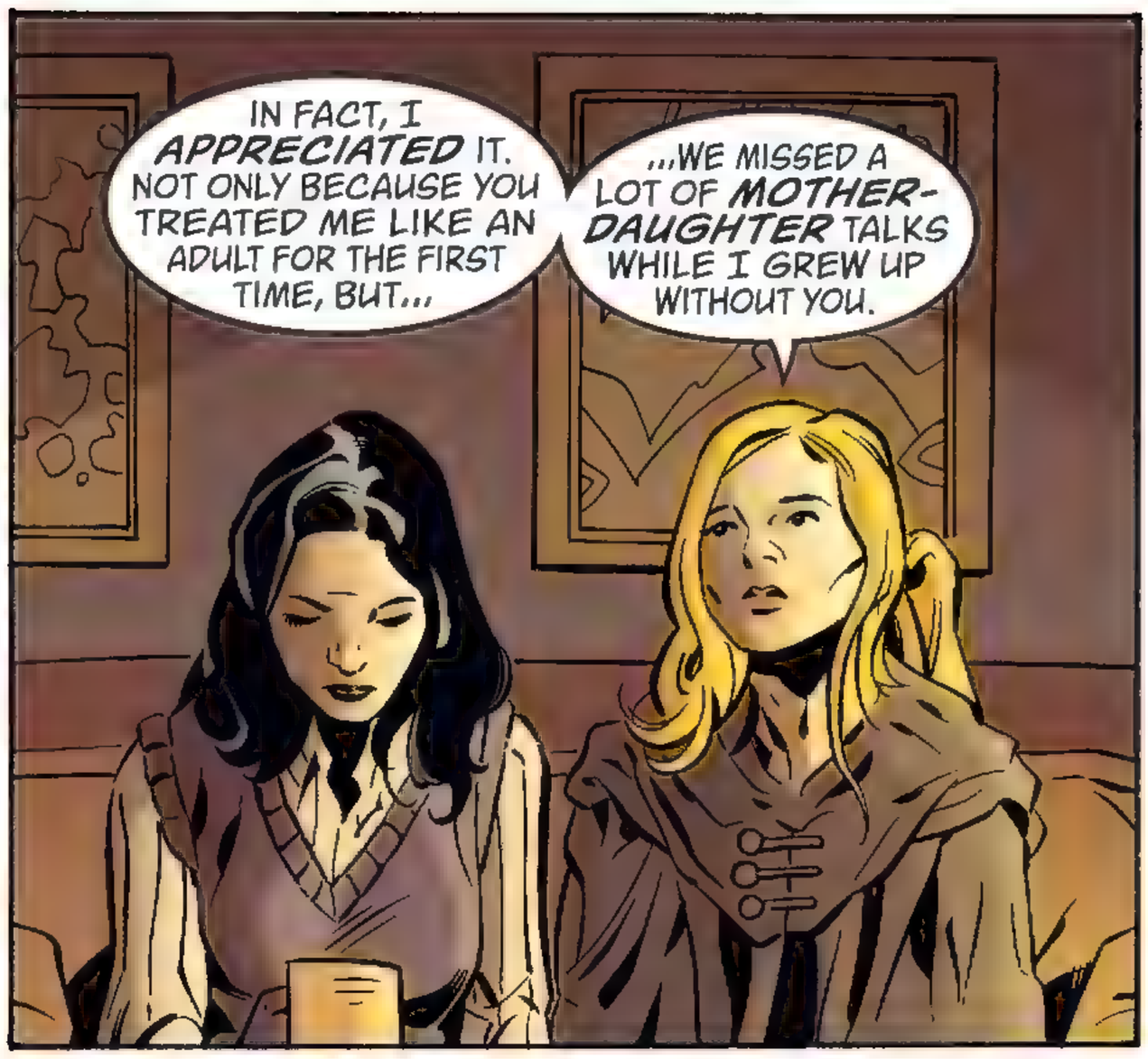
LIVING FOR SO LONG, WITHOUT ANY FEAR OF DEATH, I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW CLOSE I CAME TO A FATE LITERALLY WORSE THAN DEATH.
I OWE YOU.

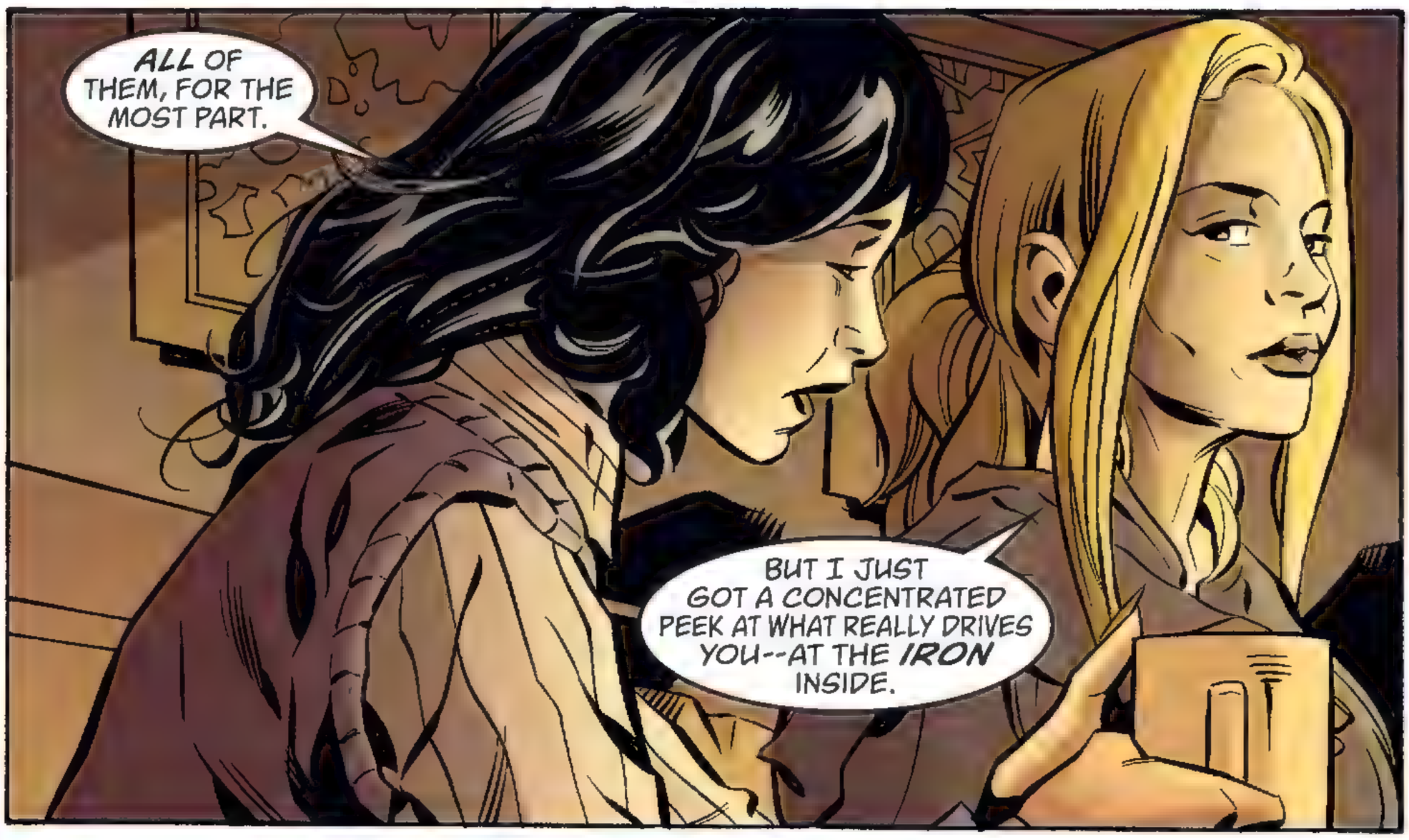
BACK OFF, HOMBRE, AND DIAL DOWN THE HEAT. THE LAST OF MY NAIVETÉ WAS SPENT LONG AGO.
YOU'RE STILL SCUM.

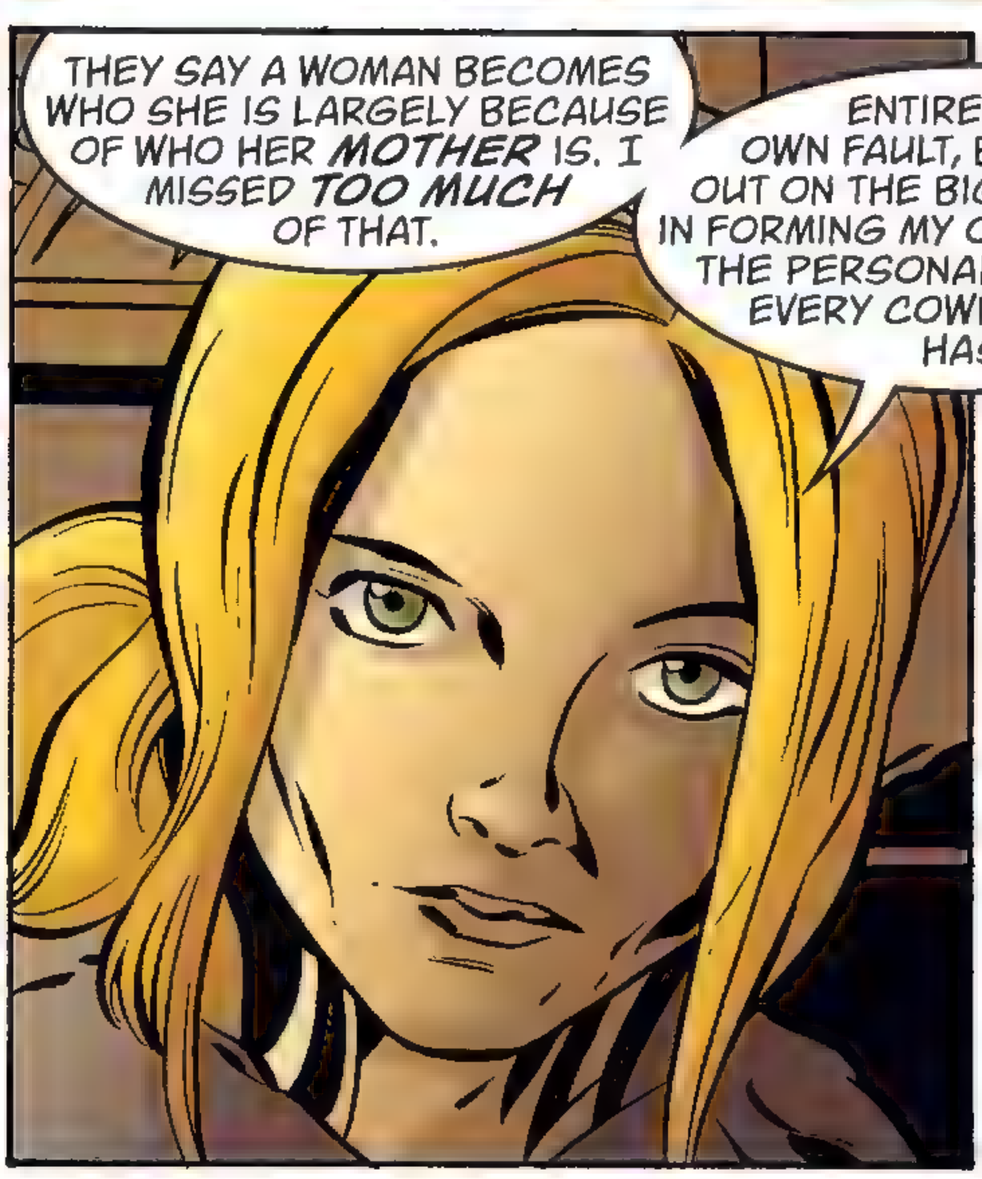
AND NOW WE'LL START THE LONG AND DIFFICULT PROCESS OF YOU EARNING YOUR WAY UP IN THE RANKS TO MERE FILTHY ANIMAL.
CALL THIS DAY ONE OF NOBILITY BOOT CAMP. YOU WON'T LIKE IT.

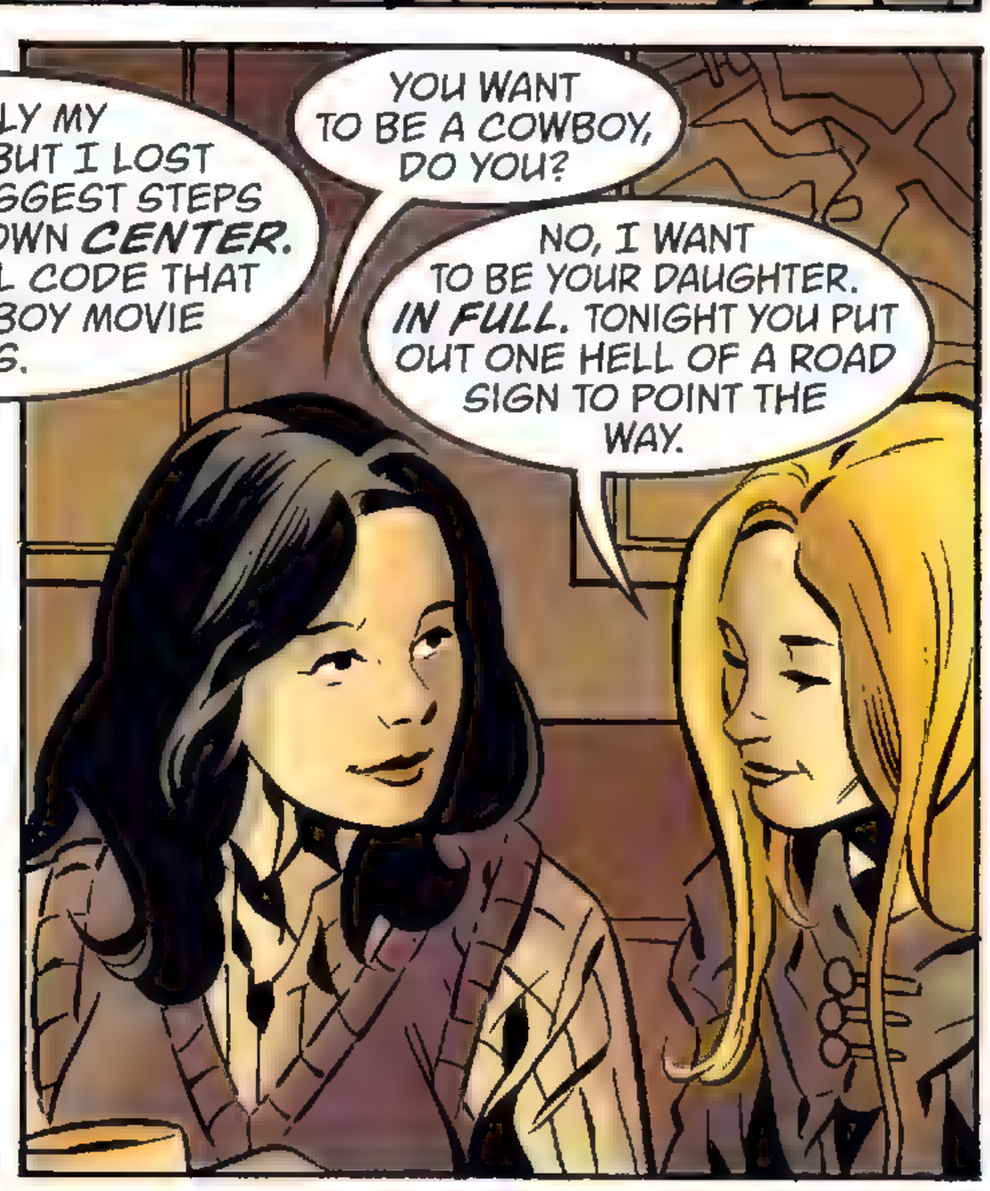
YOU'RE FLYING TOO LOW TO THE GROUND.
DON'T WORRY. I WON'T LET ANYONE NOTICE US.

I'M SORRY TO UNLOAD LIKE THAT IN FRONT OF YOU, THERESE.
DON'T WORRY, MOM.


IN FACT, I APPRECIATED IT. NOT ONLY BECAUSE YOU TREATED ME LIKE AN ADULT FOR THE FIRST TIME, BUT...
...WE MISSED A LOT OF MOTHER-DAUGHTER TALKS WHILE I GREW UP WITHOUT YOU.

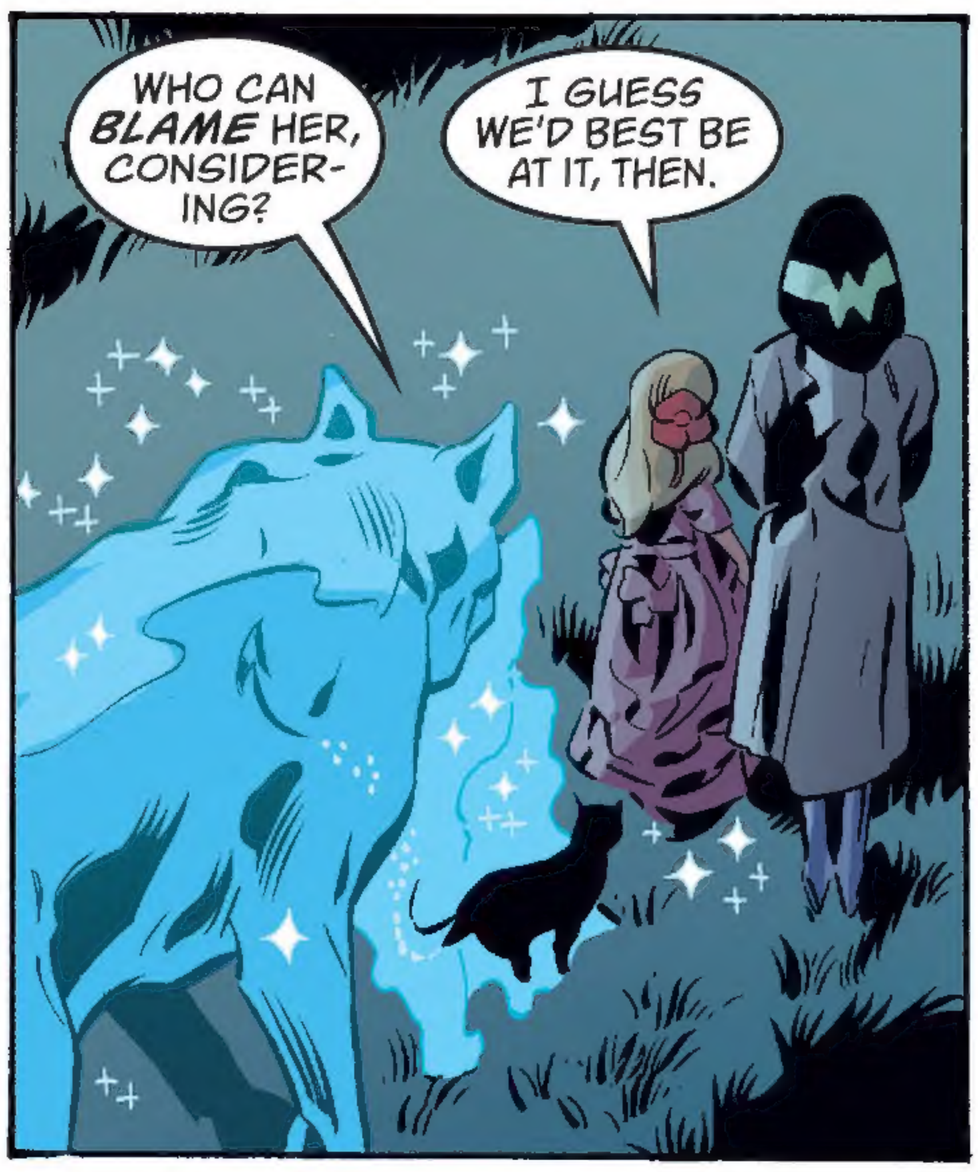

ALL OF THEM, FOR THE MOST PART.
BUT I JUST GOT A CONCENTRATED PEEK AT WHAT REALLY DRIVES YOU--AT THE IRON INSIDE.

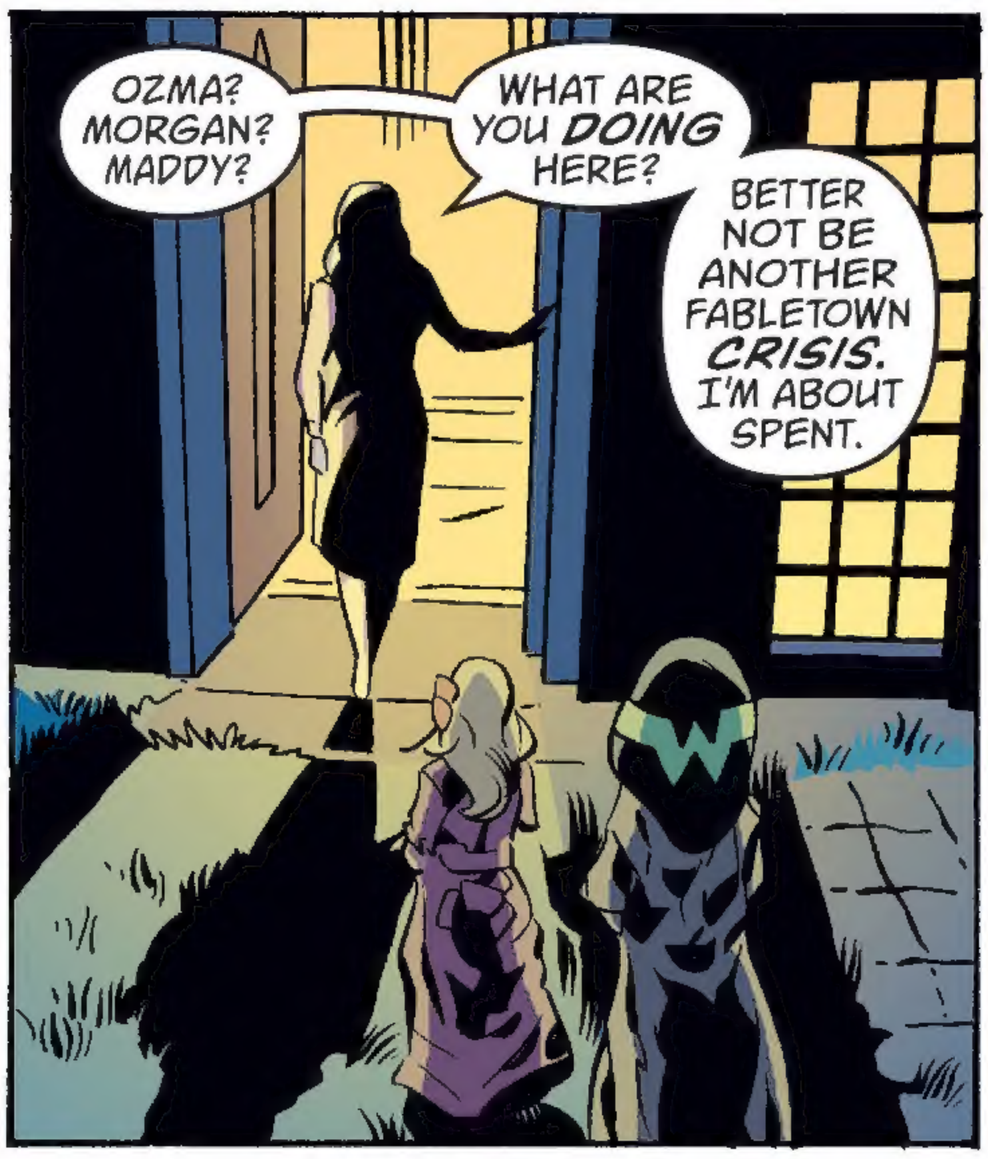

THEY SAY A WOMAN BECOMES WHO SHE IS LARGELY BECAUSE OF WHO HER MOTHER IS. I MISSED TOO MUCH OF THAT.
ENTIRELY MY OWN FAULT, BUT I LOST OUT ON THE BIGGEST STEPS IN FORMING MY OWN CENTER. THE PERSONAL CODE THAT EVERY COWBOY MOVIE HAS.


YOU WANT TO BE A COWBOY, DO YOU?
NO, I WANT TO BE YOUR DAUGHTER. IN FULL. TONIGHT YOU PUT OUT ONE HELL OF A ROAD SIGN TO POINT THE WAY.

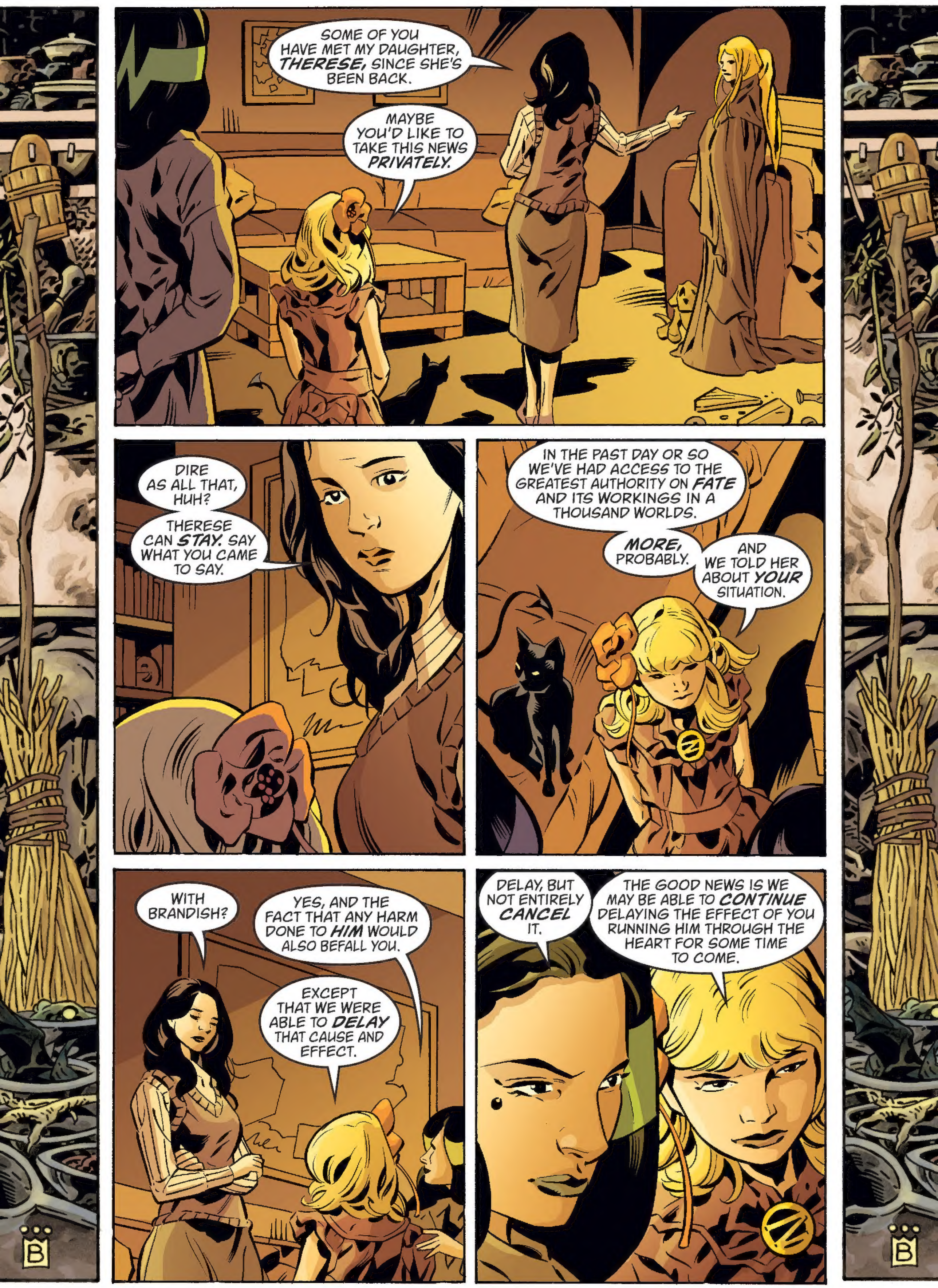
THANK YOU FOR THAT.
YOU GOT US HERE FAST. WILL SHE EVEN BE AWAKE YET?
MAYBE WE SHOULD PUT THIS OFF FOR--
SHE'S AWAKE. I CAN HEAR HER INSIDE.

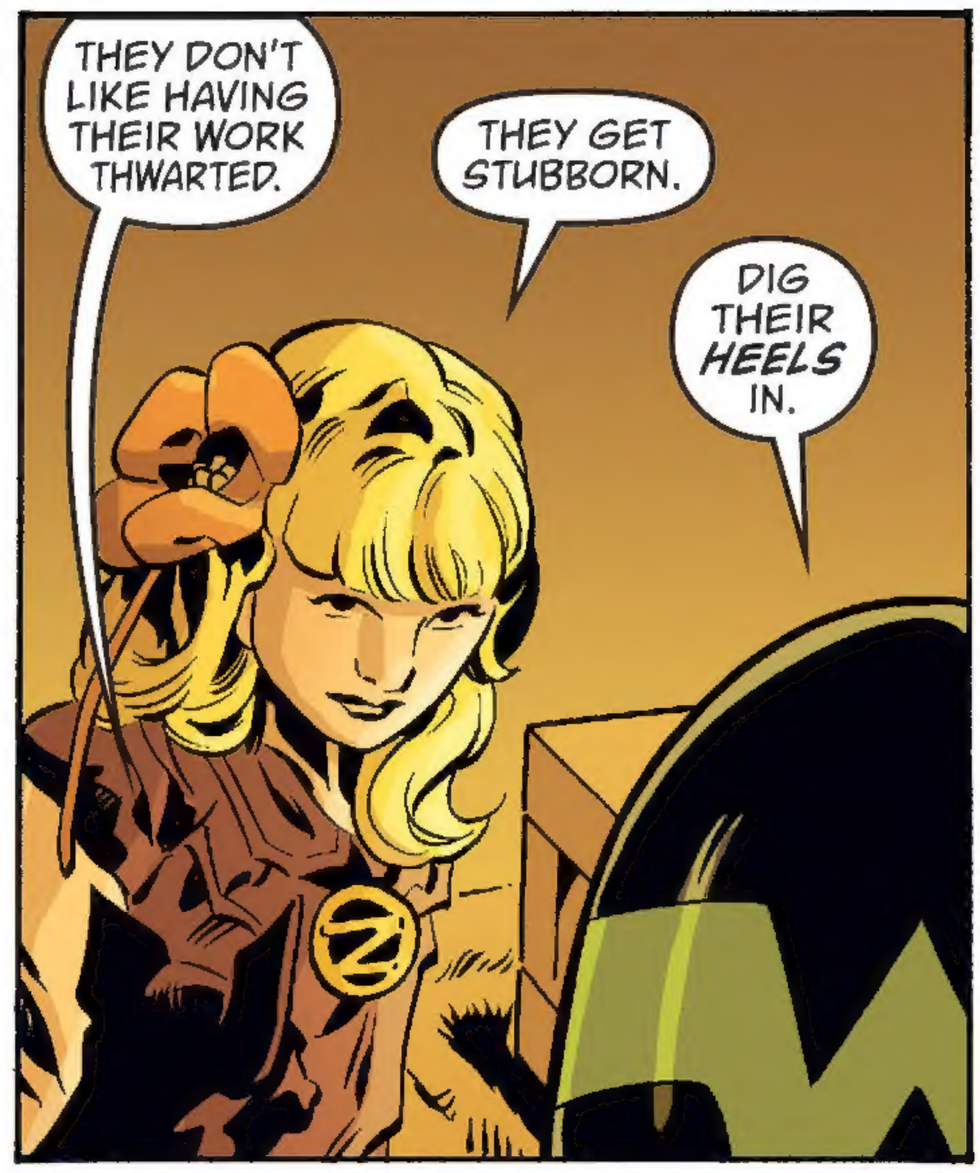
CLARA TELLS ME SHE HASN'T BEEN SLEEPING MUCH.


WHO CAN BLAME HER, CONSIDERING?
I GUESS WE'D BEST BE AT IT, THEN.


OZMA? MORGAN? MADDY?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
BETTER NOT BE ANOTHER FABLETOWN CRISIS. I'M ABOUT SPENT.

CAN WE COME IN?


SOME OF YOU HAVE MET MY DAUGHTER, THERESE, SINCE SHE'S BEEN BACK.
MAYBE YOU'D LIKE TO TAKE THIS NEWS PRIVATELY.
DIRE AS ALL THAT, HUH?
THERESE CAN STAY. SAY WHAT YOU CAME TO SAY.
IN THE PAST DAY OR SO WE'VE HAD ACCESS TO THE GREATEST AUTHORITY ON FATE AND ITS WORKINGS IN A THOUSAND WORLDS.
MORE, PROBABLY.
AND WE TOLD HER ABOUT YOUR SITUATION.
WITH BRANDISH?
YES, AND THE FACT THAT ANY HARM DONE TO HIM WOULD ALSO BEFALL YOU.
EXCEPT THAT WE WERE ABLE TO DELAY THAT CAUSE AND EFFECT.
DELAY, BUT NOT ENTIRELY CANCEL IT.
THE GOOD NEWS IS WE MAY BE ABLE TO CONTINUE DELAYING THE EFFECT OF YOU RUNNING HIM THROUGH THE HEART FOR SOME TIME TO COME.



NEXT: INTO THE DEEP WOODS

NAHGA